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SCHELL

Grazing Environmental Impact Statement

SUMMARY

**United States Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management
Ely District Office
Ely, Nevada**

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SUMMARY

ALTERNATIVES, INCLUDING THE
PROPOSED ACTION

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) proposes to implement a livestock grazing management program in the Schell Resource Area (RA) of the Ely District, Nevada. The Schell RA encompasses 4,240,000 ac of public land in east central Nevada (see Location Map). About 119,000 ac of private land are intermingled throughout the area. The Humboldt National Forest, Lehman Caves National Monument, and the Goshute Indian Reservation all have lands within, or adjacent to, the Schell RA, accounting for another 1,642,000 ac.

Analyzed in this environmental impact statement (EIS) are the Proposed Action and four alternatives: Resource Protection, Graze at Preference, No Livestock Grazing, and No Action. Chapter 1 discusses the alternatives, including the Proposed Action. Major differences between alternatives revolve around allocation of forage. Management Framework Plan Step 3 (MFP-3) decisions will be made in 1983 on the grazing management program to be implemented. The actual schedule of implementation will not be known until that time. Final decisions will be based on the area Manager's recommendations, this EIS, monitoring data, and inputs from Coordinated Resource Management and Planning (CRMP). The Proposed Action starts with present use (the 1977-1979 three year average) or 136,669 AUMs. Livestock and wild horse adjustments would be made in 3 years when monitoring data would be available to manage forage utilization at sustained yield levels. For analysis purposes in this and the other alternatives, reductions in livestock and wild horse use of 10 percent were assumed to be required in 35 allotments with a present utilization problem. In the short term, increases in use are allowed due to range management actions (seedlings, water development, AMPs, grazing systems) that would potentially increase available forage (Summary Figure 1). By the end of the short term, livestock use would be about 138,006 AUMs, 101 percent of present use. Slight increases would occur in the long term due to additional management actions in that in the long term use would be about 104 percent of present.

The Resource Protection alternative would initially reduce present use by 22,156 AUMs (16 percent) which would be allocated to wildlife. Intensive range management actions would increase livestock and wild horse use slightly in the remainder of the short term, but would remain below present levels. In the long term, wild horse and livestock use is expected to increase from short term levels, but still not back to present use. Wildlife use would remain at short term levels.

The Graze at Preference alternative would initially license livestock use at active preference, a 92 percent increase over present use, and remove all wild horses. For analysis purposes, it has been assumed that this would cause severe overgrazing on most allotments, resulting in significant reductions in use within 3 years when monitoring data becomes available. Range management actions, primarily 3-5 years of total

rest from livestock grazing, would be required to return most of the area to usable status. In the long term, livestock use would still be nearly 50 percent lower than present use on most allotments.

The No Grazing alternative analyzes the effects of complete removal of livestock grazing, which would provide additional forage for wildlife and wild horses.

The No Action alternative assumes livestock, wildlife, and wild horse use would remain the same as at present in the short and long terms.

The present condition of the affected resource area is discussed in Chapter 2. The environmental impacts of the alternatives, including the proposed action, are discussed in Chapter 3 and are summarized in Summary Table 1. This table outlines by discipline the significant adverse impacts (SAI) and significant beneficial impacts (SBI) of each alternative and provides a basis for public review and for making a choice among options.

During scoping for this EIS, and during the MFP conflict analysis, 5 major resource problems that are occurring in the Schell RA were noted. Objectives were devised to help solve the problems. The problems and objectives are:

1. Problem: Improper utilization of the vegetation resource occurring on portions of the Schell RA.

Objective: Manage the vegetation resource and its uses to attain utilization rates not to exceed those recommended by the Nevada Rangeland Monitoring Task Force for sustained yield (45 percent for shrubs, 55 percent for grasses and forbs).

2. Problem: A decline in historic wildlife numbers and crucial habitat that is unprotected.

Objective: Attain and maintain habitat for reasonable numbers of wildlife, reestablish bighorn, pronghorn antelope, and elk on historic ranges, and protect crucial wildlife habitat.

3. Problem: Less than good condition of many riparian and wetland areas.

Objective: Upgrade and maintain all riparian and wetland areas in good or better condition.

4. Problem: A decline in livestock use in the Schell RA from historic authorized grazing use levels (active preference).

Objective: Maximize livestock based on sustained yield of the forage resource.

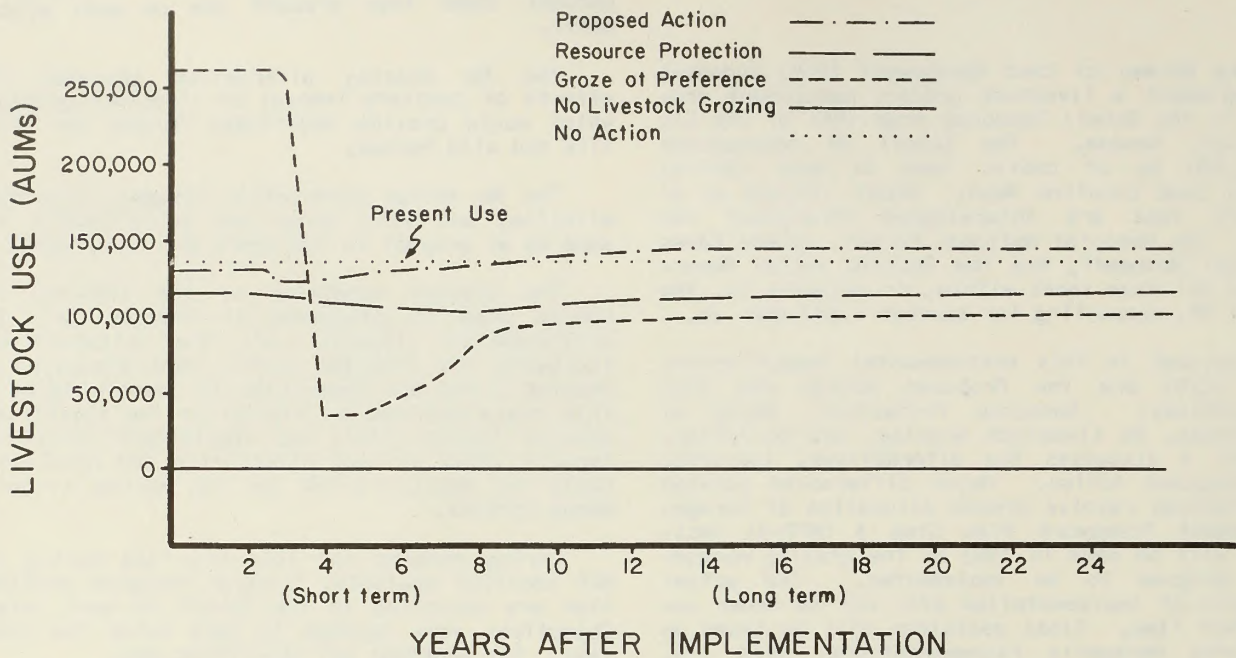
5. Problem: Reduction of wild horse numbers below potential population levels.

Objective: Maximize wild horse numbers based on sustained yield of the forage resource.

The No Action and Graze at Preference alternatives meet none of the objectives. The Resource Protection alternative meets 3 of the objectives completely, improper utilization, reasonable numbers of wildlife and protection of riparian-wetland areas. The No Grazing alternative meets problems 1, 2, 3, and 5 totally (improper utilization, wildlife, riparian-

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Summary Figure 1. Graphic display of changes in livestock use due to implementation of alternatives for the Schell Resource Area grazing management program.



wetlands, wild horses). The Proposed Action meets problem 1 (improper utilization) completely, and partially meets objectives to problems 2, 3, 4, and 5 (wildlife, riparian-wetlands, livestock, and wild horses, respectively).

SCOPING COMMENTS

Scoping meetings were held in April 1981 in Ploche, Ely, Baker, and Reno, Nevada, to elicit public opinion concerning the Proposed Action and alternatives. Numerous additional contacts were made before and after the scoping meetings with various interested federal, state, and local agencies and other interest groups. Five major areas of concern or controversy dominated the comments. Environmental groups were concerned that the Schell RA was presently being overutilized by livestock and wild horses and that continuing existing use would not solve the problem. They suggested making initial forage allocations based on the 1978-79 range survey forage production data, rather than initially licensing at present livestock use and then monitoring to determine changes. Due to a lack of soils information and long term production data, the range survey was not used to adjust use. These groups,

and others, were also concerned that inadequate forage and habitat for wildlife were contributing to low wildlife numbers. This concern was especially noted for riparian and wetland areas, often extremely important for wildlife and ecosystem diversity. The ranching community was concerned that BLM was attempting to decrease the level of livestock use, a use that in many cases is several generations old in the Schell RA. Wild horse groups were concerned that wild horse management centered on horse removal, rather than positive management.

Several people did not believe that BLM would be able to fund and carry out an extensive monitoring program, judging from past performance. Another federal agency questioned the format of the No Action alternative. Many of the comments concerned the manner in which vegetation allocation was to be handled in the EIS and centered on BLM administrative decisions rather than impacts to be analyzed in the EIS.

Other alternatives that were considered for this EIS but were dropped because they were neither reasonable nor feasible in light of BLM's multiple use objectives included: maximize wild horses, maximize wildlife, maximize livestock, and a 40 to 50 percent reduction in livestock.

Summary Table 1. Grazing Impact Summary for the Schell Resource Area.

Environmental Elements	Proposed Action	Resource Protection	Grazing at Preference	No Livestock Grazing	No Action
Water Quality	Short Term No significant change over present levels.	Short Term Water quality would improve due to fencing and reduced livestock levels, but not significantly.	Short Term Water quality would decline in most springs and streams due to increased numbers of livestock.	Short and Long Term Water quality would improve, but not significantly, due to decreased livestock use.	Short and Long Term No change over present levels.
	Long Term No significant change over present levels.	Long Term Water quality would continue to improve.	Long Term Water quality would probably improve to near present levels.		
Soils (erosion)	Short Term Improvement in erosion in at least 23 percent of Schell RA due to sustained yield utilization - SBI.	Short Term Improvement in erosion in majority of the Schell RA due to sustained yield utilization and decreased livestock use - SBI.	Short Term Increased erosion in over 50 percent of the Schell RA due to increased livestock use - SBI.	Short and Long Term Improvement in erosion in all of Schell RA except potentially in a few areas of wild horse concentration - SBI.	Short Term No change over present.
	Long Term Continued improvement - SBI.	Long Term Continued improvement - SBI.	Long Term Continued greater erosion than at present in over 50 percent of Schell RA - SAI.		Long Term Increased erosion in 23 percent of Schell RA in downward trend - SAI.
Vegetation Livestock Condition and Apparent Trend	Short Term Improvement in at least 23 percent of Schell RA in a downward trend due to sustained yield utilization - SBI.	Short Term Improvement in majority of Schell RA due to decreased livestock use and sustained yield utilization - SBI.	Short Term Decline in over 50 percent of Schell RA due to increased livestock use - SAI.	Short and Long Term Improvement in the entire Schell RA due to removal of livestock - SBI.	Short Term Little change over present.
	Long Term Continued improvement - SBI.	Long Term Continued improvement - SBI.	Long Term Gradual improvement in most areas but still lower than at present - SAI.		Long Term Decline in 23 percent of Schell RA presently in a downward trend - SAI.
Riparian and Wetland Areas	Short Term Improvement in about 250 ac of riparian habitat due to fencing.	Short Term Improvement in 750 ac of riparian and 11,700 ac of wetland habitat due to fencing or other improvement - SBI.	Short Term Decline in all riparian and wetland areas due to increased livestock use - SAI.	Short and Long Term Improvement in all riparian and wetland areas due to removal of livestock - SBI.	Short and Long Term No change over present.
	Long Term Additional improvement but the area is not quantifiable.	Long Term Additional improvement but the area is not quantifiable.	Long Term No, or very little, improvement from short term - SAI.		
Poisonous Plants and Sensitive Plants	Short and Long Term No significant impacts.	Short and Long Term No significant impacts.	Short Term Potential for increased poisonous plants and destruction of some sensitive plants by heavy grazing - SAI.	Short and Long Term No significant impacts.	Short and Long Term No significant impacts.
Livestock Grazing	Short Term Increase in livestock use of about 1 percent over present use.	Short Term Decrease in livestock use of about 11 percent due to reserving forage for wildlife and reductions to achieve sustained yield - SAI.	Short Term Livestock use would decrease 31 percent from present levels due to overutilization during the first 3 years - SAI.	Short and Long Term All livestock would be removed from public lands, decreasing present livestock production by 136,669 AUMs - SAI.	Short and Long Term Livestock numbers would remain at present levels, although some minor reductions would be expected in the long term.
	Long Term Increase in livestock use about 1 percent above short term use.	Long Term Additional AUMs (3,596) would accrue due to intensive management actions, increasing livestock use to less than 10 percent below present use.	Long Term Livestock use would increase but still be more than 10 percent below present levels - SAI.		

Summary Table 1. Continued

Environmental Elements	Proposed Action	Resource Protection	Grazing at Preference	No Livestock Grazing	No Action
Wildlife Big Game	Short Term Slight improvement in big game habitat condition and increases in population levels due to sustained yield utilization.	Short Term Habitat and forage for reasonable number of all big game would be reserved and overall habitat condition would improve - SBI.	Short Term Forage and habitat condition for big game would decrease due to overutilization by livestock - SAI.	Short and Long Term Big game would be able to expand throughout the Schell RA due to the removal of livestock - SBI.	Short and Long Term No changes in big game populations or habitat condition are expected.
	Long Term Continued slight improvement.	Long Term Continued habitat condition improvement.	Long Term No significant improvement would occur, continuing the low short term levels of big game - SAI.		
	Short and Long Term No significant impacts.	Short Term The improvement of 750 ac of riparian and 11,700 ac of wetland habitat due to fencing or other actions would benefit upland game and waterfowl. Meadows would improve due to decreased livestock use - SBI.	Short Term Overutilization of all habitats, especially in 3,265,000 ac where it would be most severe, would decrease habitat condition and therefore populations of upland game and waterfowl - SAI.	Short and Long Term All habitats would improve due to the removal of livestock use - SBI.	Short and Long Term No change in population levels or habitat condition would occur.
Nongame		Long Term Continued improvement in habitat for upland game and waterfowl.	Long Term Some improvement would occur, but habitat still would be degraded in most of the Schell RA from present levels.		
	Short Term Nongame habitat would improve due to fencing of streams and wetlands and primarily due to habitat improvement in at least 23 percent of the Schell RA due to sustained yield utilization and intensive grazing management - SBI.	Short Term All habitats for nongame wildlife would improve due to livestock reductions, sustained yield utilization and fencing or other improvement of 750 ac of riparian and 11,700 ac of wetland habitat - SBI.	Short Term Habitat condition would decline in 3,265,000 ac due to increased livestock use for 3 years - SAI.	Short and Long Term Habitat condition would improve throughout the area, with increased populations of nongame wildlife, due to the elimination of livestock grazing - SBI.	Short and Long Term No major changes over present conditions would occur.
	Long Term Continued improvement in nongame habitat.	Long Term Continued improvement in nongame habitat.	Long Term Some recovery would occur, but habitat and population would still be below present levels.		
Aquatics	Short Term Fencing would improve 9.8 mi of fish stream - SBI. Increased livestock use would decrease habitat condition on 5 mi of fish stream - SAI.	Short Term Fencing or other techniques would improve 31.7 mi of fish streams - SBI.	Short Term Twenty-two of the 26 fish streams in the area would be degraded by increased livestock use - SAI.	Short and Long Term All streams would be improved due to elimination of livestock - SBI.	Short and Long Term Stream habitat condition would remain at present levels.
	Long Term Additional streams would probably be improved.	Long Term Additional streams would be improved if their habitat condition was less than good.	Long Term Some improvement would occur in stream habitat quality, but present levels would still not be reached.		

Summary Table 1. Continued

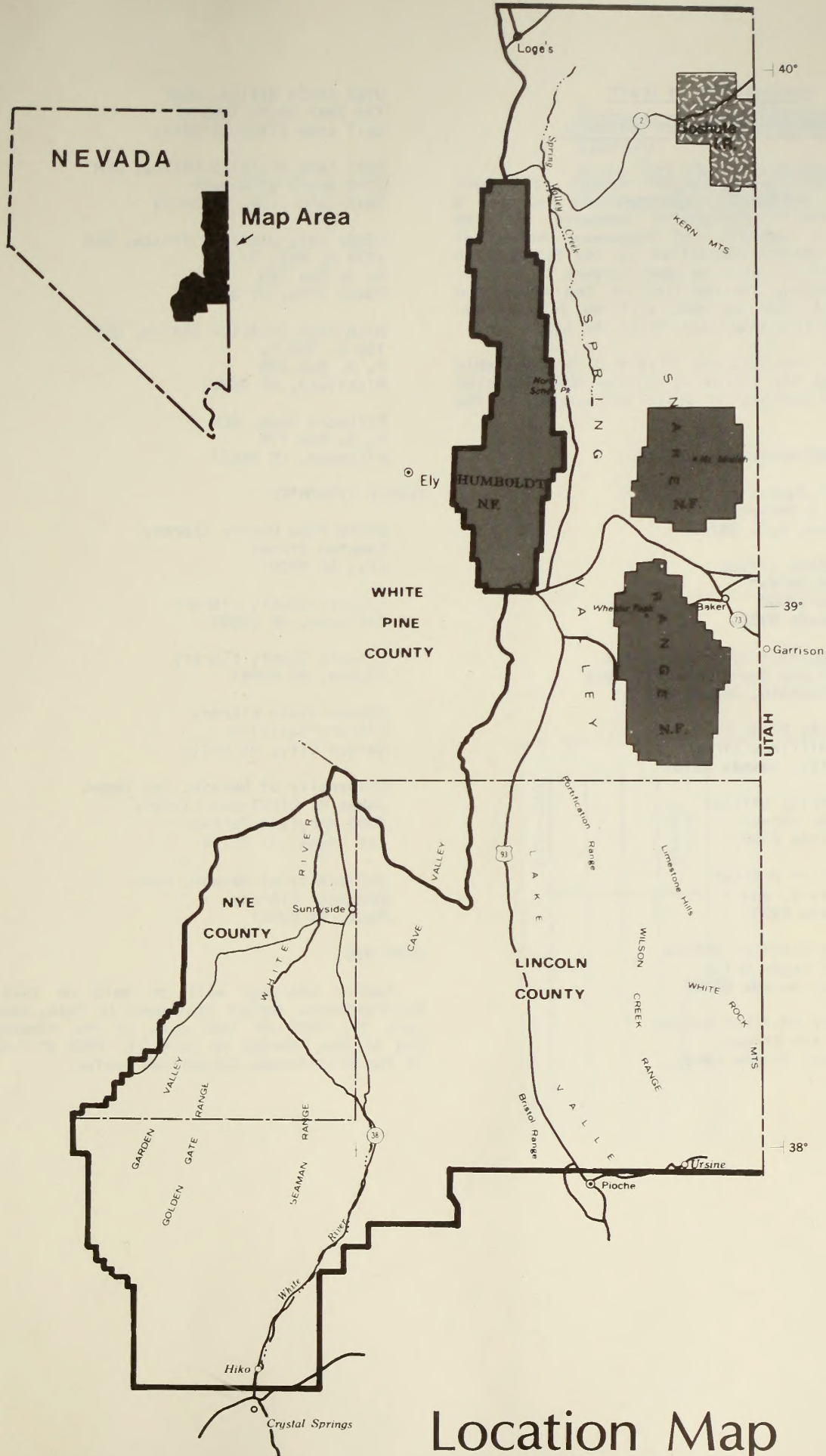
Environmental Elements	Proposed Action	Resource Protection	Grazing at Preference	No Livestock Grazing	No Action
Wild Horses	Short and Long Term No significant impacts. Mortality of 1-2 percent would be expected during periodic roundups to maintain present levels of use.	Short Term The Antelope Herd would be reduced by 68 horses (27%) - SAI. Additional horses would be removed from other herd units, possibly resulting in significant losses to some herds - SAI. About 1 or 2 horses would die during roundup activities.	Short and Long Term All wild horses would be removed from the Schell RA - SAI. About 5-10 horses would die during roundup and holding.	Short and Long Term Wild horses would be allowed to maximize at about 2,000 as forage would be available due to elimination of livestock - SBI.	Short and Long Term Population levels would remain at about present levels as periodic roundups would remove excess animals. A 1-2 percent mortality during roundup would be expected.
	Long Term No significant impacts.				
Recreation	Short and Long Term Slight increase in fisherman days, increase of 74 hunter days per year, and slight increases in camping and ORV use.	Short and Long Term Slight increase in fisherman days, increase of 7,000 hunter days per year and attendant increases in camping and ORV use - SBI.	Short and Long Term At least a 10% reduction in hunter days is expected - SAI.	Short and Long Term Slight increases in fisherman days, increase of 7,000 hunter days, and attendant increases in camping and ORV use - SBI.	Short and Long Term No major changes over present use patterns.
	Long Term Little significant change over present conditions.	Short and Long Term Reduced chance of loss of cultural resources due to decreased livestock use.	Short Term Increased chance for loss of cultural resources due to increased livestock use.	Short and Long Term Reduced potential for loss of cultural resources due to decreased livestock use.	Short and Long Term No major changes from present levels of impact.
Paleontology	Short and Long Term No significant impacts.	Short and Long Term No significant impacts.	Short and Long Term The potential for the loss of scientifically valuable fossils is increased due to grazing at preference - SAI.	Short and Long Term No significant impacts.	Short and Long Term No significant impacts.
	Short Term No significant impacts.	Short Term Small and medium sized cattle ranches would be reduced 6 and 8 percent in net income by livestock reduction - SAI. All ranch classes would be reduced from 7 to 21 percent by livestock reductions and a period of rest - SAI. Some ranchers would go out of business.	Short Term Many ranchers would be out of business. All ranch size classes would be significantly reduced (6 to 20 percent) in net income without water or seeding development - SAI. Only small cattle ranches would be significantly adversely affected if water and seeding developments were maximized on these allotments - SAI.	Short and Long Term Most ranchers would go out of business. Sheep operations would be the least affected but net cash income would still be decreased by 26 percent from present levels; cattle operators would be decreased from 18 to 58 percent - SAI.	Short and Long Term No significant changes from present conditions.
Economics Ranch Operations	Long Term Sheep operators would have a 5 percent increase in net income if water developments and seedings were placed totally on their allotments - SBI. No other ranch size would be significantly affected by this alternative.	Long Term Medium sized cattle ranches would be reduced 6 percent in net income without a period of rest - SAI. All ranches except sheep operators would be reduced 7 to 22 percent by a period of rest - SAI.	Long Term Net income would probably increase but is not quantifiable.		

Summary Table 1. Continued

Environmental Elements	Proposed Action	Resource Protection	Grazing at Preference	No Livestock Grazing	No Action
Economics Regional	Short and Long Term No significant impacts.	Short Term Significant (5 percent) reductions would occur in the livestock and food and feed grain sectors without a period of rest, wholesale and retail sales would also be significantly reduced with a period of rest - SAI.	Short Term Significant decreases in employment and sales in the livestock and food and feed grain sectors would occur by the end of short term - SAI. Long Term Significant adverse impacts would probably continue.	Short and Long Term Changes in livestock and food and feed grain sectors would be greater than 50 percent from present levels - SAI.	Short and Long Term No significant changes from present conditions.
Social Ranching Community	Short and Long Term Little significant impact but the overall increase in livestock use due to intensive grazing management would benefit ranchers and the rancher-BLM relationship.	Short and Long Term Livestock reductions for wildlife would cause a deterioration in relationships between ranchers and BLM - SAI.	Short and Long Term Relationships between ranchers and BLM would deteriorate after reductions in livestock use are made. Some ranchers would be forced out of business - SAI.	Short and Long Term The loss of grazing on public land would force most ranchers out of business and cause them to leave the area in search of employment - SAI.	Short and Long Term Ranchers would not be satisfied with the status quo, relationship with BLM would deteriorate - SAI.
Local Community	Short and Long Term No significant impacts.	Short and Long Term Adverse impacts to ranchers would create opposition to BLM policies in the local community - SAI.	Short and Long Term The overall relationship between the local community and BLM would deteriorate - SAI.	Short and Long Term The loss of most of the local ranching would result in strong opposition from the local community, as well as lifestyle and leadership changes - SAI.	Short and Long Term No significant impacts.
Regional and National	Short and Long Term No significant impacts.	Short and Long Term Most wild horse, wildlife, and environmental groups would support this alternative - SBI.	Short and Long Term Wild horse, wildlife, and environmental groups would not favor this alternative due to adverse impacts to multiple use management - SAI.	Short and Long Term Enhanced opportunities for wild horses and wildlife would generally be viewed favorably, although the loss of ranching would be considered adverse by most regional and national groups. Overall impact would be beneficial - SBI.	Short and Long Term Dissatisfaction with present policies by wild horse, wildlife, and environmental groups, especially existing use of livestock, would cause a deterioration of relationships between these groups, BLM, and ranchers - SAI.

a SBI = Significant Beneficial Impact.

b SAI = Significant Adverse Impact.



Location Map

Availability of Draft
Environmental Impact Statement

The Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) will be sent to everyone who requests a copy and their substantive comments will be treated in a comments and responses section of the FEIS. Others identified in the Preparation Plan for this EIS will be sent letters of notification regarding availability of the Draft and Hearings. A news release will be issued statewide concerning availability of the EIS.

Copies of the DEIS and FEIS will be available for review at the following offices and libraries (* indicates address to write for copies of the EIS).

BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT OFFICES

Office of Public Affairs, BLM
18th and C Streets
Washington, D.C. 20240

Nevada State Office
300 Booth Street
P. O. Box 12000
Reno, Nevada 89520

Battle Mountain District Office
North 2nd and South Scott Streets
Battle Mountain, Nevada 89820

Carson City District Office
1050 E. Williams Street
Carson City, Nevada 89701

Elko District Office
2002 Idaho Street
Elko, Nevada 89801

Ely District Office*
Star Route 5, Box 1
Ely, Nevada 89301

Las Vegas District Office
4765 West Vegas Drive
Las Vegas, Nevada 89102

Winnemucca District Office
705 East 4th Street
Winnemucca, Nevada 89445

Utah State Office, BLM
136 East South Temple
Salt Lake City, UT 84111

Salt Lake District Office, BLM
2370 South 2300 West
Salt Lake City, UT 84119

Cedar City District Office, BLM
1579 N. Main St.
P. O. Box 729
Cedar City, UT 84720

Richfield District Office, BLM
150 E. 900 N.
P. O. Box 208
Richfield, UT 84701

Fillmore Area, BLM
P. O. Box 778
Fillmore, UT 84631

PUBLIC LIBRARIES

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Caliente, NV 89008

Lincoln County Library
Pioche, NV 89043

Nevada State Library
Library Building
Carson City, NV 89710

University of Nevada, Las Vegas
James R. Dickinson Library
4505 Maryland Parkway
Las Vegas, NV 89154

University of Nevada, Reno
Getchell Library
Reno, NV 89507

HEARINGS

Public hearings will be held on this Draft Environmental Impact Statement in Reno, Nevada on July 12, 1982 at 7:00 p.m. at the Pioneer Inn, and in Ely, Nevada on July 13, 1982 at 7:00 p.m. in the Bristlecone Convention Center.

Bureau of Land Management
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